Eagle-Eye Tours

British Columbia Coast & Pelagic Itinerary

Link: British Columbia Coast & Pelagic

Tour Overview

Explore Canada’s spectacular Pacific Coast on our BC Coast & Pelagic birding tour, a short but exciting adventure combining exceptional seabird watching, shorebird migration and the wild beauty of Vancouver Island. Beginning in Vancouver, we visit the productive mudflats of Boundary Bay before crossing the Strait of Georgia to Tofino, our base for exploring the rugged coastline of Pacific Rim National Park.

A highlight of the tour is our pelagic excursion into the open Pacific Ocean, where we venture toward the continental shelf, weather permitting, in search of Black-footed Albatross, shearwaters, storm-petrels, Tufted Puffin and other remarkable seabirds. These nutrient-rich waters also attract whales, dolphins and other marine wildlife, making every trip offshore an exciting journey of discovery.

Back on land, we’ll explore windswept beaches, rocky shorelines and lush temperate rainforests, searching for migrating shorebirds, coastal specialties and forest birds. Late summer is an excellent time to experience shorebird migration, while the magnificent old-growth forests of Cathedral Grove offer a striking contrast to the open ocean.

Along the way, we’ll enjoy spectacular coastal scenery, excellent local cuisine and the relaxed atmosphere of Canada’s West Coast.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Vancouver



Upon arrival at Vancouver International Airport, you can transfer to our hotel in nearby Richmond. We'll meet for a welcome dinner, where your guide will introduce the itinerary, discuss our target birds and wildlife, and prepare us for the exciting days ahead. Night in Vancouver.

Day 2: Boundary Bay and Vancouver Island



We begin our birding at Boundary Bay, part of the vast Fraser River Delta and one of the Pacific Coast's most important stopover sites for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl. At this time of year, the extensive mudflats and marshes attract a wonderful variety of migrants, including Western, Least, Baird's and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Black-bellied Plover and Hudsonian Whimbrel. Nearby marshes and coastal shrubs offer opportunities to find Northern Harrier, Bewick's Wren, Spotted Towhee, Willow Flycatcher, Anna's Hummingbird and migrating warblers. Next, we board the ferry from Tsawwassen to Duke Point for a scenic crossing of the Strait of Georgia. Around the ferry terminal, we'll watch for Black Oystercatcher, Black Turnstone, Surf Scoter and three species of cormorant: Brandt's, Pelagic and Double-crested. During the crossing, we'll scan for Pacific Loon, Marbled Murrelet and other seabirds, along with marine mammals such as Humpback Whale and Orca. Arriving on Vancouver Island, we travel west through forested mountains and beautiful coastal scenery toward Tofino. Depending on our timing, we may make a few birding stops along the way, looking for species such as Red-breasted Sapsucker, Steller's Jay and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Night in Tofino.

Day 3: West Coast Pelagic Tour



Today is one of the highlights of our BC Coast & Pelagic tour as we venture into the open Pacific Ocean in search of seabirds and marine wildlife. Departing from Tofino, we'll travel through the sheltered waters of Clayoquot Sound, watching for Bald Eagle, Harlequin Duck, Surf Scoter, Common Murre, Rhinoceros Auklet and Marbled Murrelet. Humpback Whale, Gray Whale and Sea Otter are among the marine mammals we may encounter. Weather and sea conditions permitting, we'll continue offshore toward Clayoquot Canyon and the edge of the continental shelf, where nutrient-rich waters attract an exciting variety of pelagic birds. Black-footed Albatross is a major target, while the much rarer Laysan and Short-tailed Albatrosses are exceptional possibilities. Other seabirds we may encounter include Pink-footed, Sooty, Buller's and Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Northern Fulmar, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Sabine's Gull, Red-necked Phalarope, Cassin's Auklet and jaegers. Rare visitors such as South Polar Skua and Scripps's Murrelet add to the excitement of birding these unpredictable offshore waters. We'll also explore the waters around Cleland Island, where Tufted Puffins nest. This area is excellent for Common Murre, Rhinoceros Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot and other coastal seabirds, while rocky islets may hold Black Oystercatcher, Black Turnstone, Surfbird and Wandering Tattler. Heermann's Gull is another species we'll be watching for. Marine wildlife can be equally impressive, with possibilities including Dall's Porpoise, Northern Fur Seal, Risso's Dolphin and even Ocean Sunfish. After our boat trip, we'll return to Tofino, with time to relax or enjoy some additional local birding if conditions and energy levels allow. Night in Tofino. Note: The pelagic excursion is weather-dependent, and our route will be determined by sea conditions. If offshore conditions prevent us from reaching the continental shelf, we will focus on productive nearshore waters and sheltered coastal areas.

Day 4: Pacific Rim National Park



Today we explore the spectacular coastline, sandy beaches and temperate rainforests of Pacific Rim National Park and the surrounding Tofino and Ucluelet areas. The region offers a wonderful combination of coastal birding, forest specialties and breathtaking scenery. We may begin at Amphitrite Point, where rocky shorelines and offshore waters provide excellent opportunities to search for Wandering Tattler, Surfbird, Black Oystercatcher, Marbled Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet and Pigeon Guillemot. Loons, scoters and other migrating waterbirds are also possible. We'll explore some of the area's beautiful beaches, such as Long Beach, Combers Beach or Chesterman Beach, where flocks of migrating shorebirds gather along the shoreline. Western and Least Sandpipers, Sanderling, Semipalmated Plover and Baird's Sandpiper are among the species we'll be searching for. Gulls can also be plentiful, including Western, Glaucous-winged, California, Heermann's and Short-billed Gulls. The coastal rainforests offer a completely different birding experience. Walking beneath towering Sitka Spruce and Western Redcedar, we'll search for Pacific Wren, Varied Thrush, Brown Creeper, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Hutton's Vireo. Migrating warblers, flycatchers and Western Warbling-Vireo may also be encountered. Wildlife is another attraction of this remarkable coastline, with opportunities to encounter Black Bear. We'll make the most of the day's birding opportunities, adjusting our stops according to tides, weather and bird activity. Night in Tofino.

Day 5: Cathedral Grove and Return to Vancouver



After breakfast, we leave the west coast and travel back across Vancouver Island, stopping at Cathedral Grove in MacMillan Provincial Park. This magnificent old-growth forest is home to towering Douglas-firs and Western Redcedars, some more than 800 years old. Walking beneath these ancient giants is a memorable experience, and we'll watch and listen for forest birds such as Pacific Wren, Brown Creeper, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Steller's Jay, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Hammond's Flycatcher. Continuing east, we may have time for additional birding. Coastal estuaries can attract migrating shorebirds such as Black-bellied Plover, Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper and Greater Yellowlegs, along with waterfowl and gulls. Nearby forests offer opportunities for Hutton's Vireo, Red Crossbill and other woodland species. We'll then make our way to Duke Point for our return ferry crossing to Tsawwassen. The Strait of Georgia provides another opportunity to watch for seabirds and marine mammals. After arriving on the mainland, we return to our hotel near Vancouver International Airport for our final evening together. Night in Richmond.

Day 6: Departure

Our BC Coast & Pelagic tour concludes after breakfast at our hotel near Vancouver International Airport. You can transfer to the airport for your onward travels, taking with you wonderful memories of British Columbia's spectacular coastline, remarkable seabirds and diverse wildlife.

What to Expect

Overview

Our BC Coast & Pelagic birding tour focuses on the remarkable diversity of seabirds, shorebirds and coastal forest species found along British Columbia's Pacific Coast. While birding is our main priority, we'll also watch for marine mammals and other wildlife and enjoy the spectacular scenery of Vancouver Island and the surrounding coastline.

This is a relatively fast-paced tour, with early starts and full days in the field to make the most of our time. Our daily schedule will vary depending on weather, tides and bird activity, and we'll adjust our plans to take advantage of the best birding opportunities. The pelagic excursion requires a particularly early start, while other days combine birding with travel between locations.

Food

Breakfasts are generally at our hotel or a nearby café, although some mornings may require an earlier or quicker meal. Lunches may be at restaurants or picnic-style in the field, depending on our schedule and location. Dinners are usually at local restaurants, providing an opportunity to relax, discuss the day's highlights and review our bird sightings.

Accommodation

We stay in comfortable hotels near Vancouver International Airport, and in Tofino on Vancouver Island. Our accommodations are conveniently located for accessing the birding areas included in the tour.

Walking

Most walks on this tour are relatively short and at an easy to moderate pace, with frequent stops to observe birds and wildlife. The longest walk is approximately 3 km at slow birding pace. We will explore beaches, coastal trails, forest paths and rocky shorelines, where footing can sometimes be uneven, muddy or slippery. Some trails may include short inclines, steps or exposed roots. Sturdy footwear with good traction is recommended.

Driving

Our journey from Vancouver to Tofino includes a ferry crossing from Tsawwassen to Duke Point, followed by a scenic drive across Vancouver Island. This is a substantial travel day (~6 hrs including ferry), with birding stops along the way as time permits. The highway across the island is winding in places.

While staying in Tofino, most drives to birding locations are relatively short, although we will travel throughout the Pacific Rim National Park and Ucluelet areas.

Pelagic Boat Trip

One of the highlights of this tour is our pelagic boat excursion off the west coast of Vancouver Island. This approximately six-hour adventure takes us into the open Pacific Ocean in search of albatrosses, shearwaters, storm-petrels, auklets and other seabirds, along with whales and other marine wildlife.

Weather and sea conditions permitting, we aim to reach the productive waters around Clayoquot Canyon and the continental shelf, approximately 45–60 km offshore from Tofino. It typically takes 1.5–2 hours each way to reach these offshore birding grounds, with time spent searching for seabirds and marine wildlife along the way.

Our primary vessel is WASCO, a purpose-built coastal cruiser designed for stability, comfort and wildlife viewing. WASCO accommodates up to 10 guests plus 2 guides and features a heated indoor cabin with seating, an onboard restroom and outdoor viewing areas, allowing guests to move between sheltered and open-air spaces. Rain jackets and life jackets are available.

The open Pacific can experience significant ocean swell, even when skies are clear and winds are light. The excursion may involve prolonged periods of standing, movement on a rocking vessel and exposure to wind, ocean spray and cool temperatures. The boat trip may not be suitable for participants with serious neck or back problems or those particularly susceptible to seasickness. We strongly recommend taking appropriate precautions if you are prone to motion sickness, even if you have previous boating experience.

Safety is our first priority, and the boat captain has final discretion over the route and duration of the excursion. If offshore conditions are unsuitable, we will instead explore more sheltered coastal waters aboard the Nanuq, a 37-passenger catamaran with three viewing decks, seating and an onboard restroom.

We recommend bringing warm layers, waterproof outerwear, a hat and footwear with good traction to stay comfortable throughout the excursion.

Climate

Late August and early September are generally pleasant times to visit coastal British Columbia, although weather can be quite variable. Daytime temperatures in Vancouver and on Vancouver Island may be warm and sunny, while mornings, evenings and exposed coastal locations can be considerably cooler.

Rain, fog and wind are possible at any time, particularly along the west coast of Vancouver Island. Conditions offshore are often much cooler than on land, especially when the boat is moving or exposed to ocean winds.

We recommend dressing in layers and bringing a waterproof jacket, warm fleece, hat and sturdy, water-resistant footwear. Being prepared for a range of conditions will help you stay comfortable throughout the tour.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• All accommodation
• All meals and soft drinks
• One pelagic trip
• Ground transportation
• 1 guide with 4 - 8 participants, 2 guides and vehicles with 9 - 10 participants
• All park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Flights to and from Vancouver
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Possible additional excursion costs if you opt out of the pelagic boat trip
• Taxes (5% GST)
• Alcoholic Beverages